



Reference and Information Services Policy

Reference and Information Services Policy

POLICY:

The City of Mountain View Public Library provides reference and information services to its customers as part of its service responses to meet community needs:

- The Library provides general information.
- The Library provides lifelong learning and learning support.

The Library provides reference and information services through the use of staff, print, non-print and electronic/on-line resources.

The Library provides reference services in accordance with the principles set forth in the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights (see Appendix).

REGULATIONS:

Reference Service Standards and Limits

Successful reference service involves identifying a customer's information need and proceeding to fulfill it accurately, efficiently and pleasantly using the resources available in the Library and outside resources that are available to the staff and customer. The Library will:

- Provide accurate, objective information in a timely, consistent manner without discrimination.
- Provide information directly or through the use of instruction in the use of sources to each person.
- Provide customers training in skills that will assist them in fully utilizing Library resources. Assist customers in locating reading materials in their areas of interest.
- Cooperate with other community agencies and organizations in efforts to serve our community.

Lifelong learning can be supported by providing reference service that instructs the customer rather than simply providing them with an answer. Therefore, instruction in the use of Library resources and tools is considered an important role in providing good reference service.

Interpretative questions that require analysis or drawing of a conclusion from facts are beyond the scope of reference service since they require opinions and are not founded in fact.

Medical and legal questions cannot be answered by Reference staff since these are fields that require special training that public librarians do not have.

Exhaustive or lengthy research is not considered a role of the public reference librarian.

The Library will follow Silicon Valley Library System and California State Library guidelines if and when referral is appropriate to another level of reference service.

Information Desk staff are the link between resources and the community. Service to the public has priority over all other tasks when staff are at public service desks.

The Information Desks are staffed all hours that the Library is open to the public. Staff at these service desks are knowledgeable about Library materials, services and policies and they are approachable and professional.

Discretion when handling questions that might be confidential and sensitive is of the utmost importance. If information is available, it is provided to customers without making a judgment on its moral or aesthetic value. Staff at these desks will exercise good judgment when interacting with the community during any type of transaction.

Library users are all people seeking information whether in person, by telephone, by fax, by mail or by e-mail. Reference service is available to all Library users regardless of age, sex, religion, race, sexual orientation, disability or socioeconomic status.

Library users are expected to abide by the rules of the behavior policy when working with Information Desk staff.

Liability Statement

The Library is not liable for any damages resulting from the use of information used in the Library or provided by the Library or the Library staff. The Library is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained in the sources it owns or of information it provides from any other sources.

Attachments

- Reference Services Procedures
- Guidelines to Specific Types of Questions
- ALA Library Bill of Rights
- Freedom to Read Statement

Adopted by the Library Board of Trustees: November 21, 2005

Revised: ALA Library Bill of Rights & Freedom to Read Statement added September 11, 2006

REFERENCE SERVICES PROCEDURES

Reference Service Types and Their Priorities

Service to the public is given the highest priority by staff at public service desks. Reference questions are accepted in person, by phone, e-mail, fax and mail. The staff will answer the questions using the best sources possible in their professional judgment. The source of an answer should always be cited. While the staff will be sympathetic to customer-imposed deadlines for information, they cannot guarantee that the question will be answered in the time needed.

Every reasonable effort will be made to complete each reference question successfully. Not all questions are answerable. At no time will a Librarian offer an opinion nor interpret any information that is

found. Please see "Guidelines to Specific Types of Questions" for limitations on specific information requests.

Many customers come to the Library in search of recreational reading or viewing. The Library offers an extensive collection of fiction, mysteries, science fiction, westerns and short stories as well as a broad selection of movies both popular and enduring. The staff will assist customers in finding reading and viewing material using reader's advisory tools and personal recommendations. This is an exception where the staff can offer personal opinions.

Staff should give customers the choice of having information found for them or learning how to find it themselves. A customer should not have to learn how to use reference tools if their questions are simple, ready reference questions. However, staff cannot carry out lengthy, extended research for customers. Whenever possible and/or practical, staff should accompany customers to the shelves to locate materials. When this is not possible, staff should encourage customers to return to the desk if they need additional materials or if they are unable to find the required materials.

The level of busyness at the service desk or the impending closing of the Library may require the staff person to ask customers to either wait or return the next day if their question is beyond a short, factual look up of information.

There may be emergencies or other critical situations that will require the Librarian to leave the desk momentarily. Every effort will be made to find a replacement to cover the desk as soon as is feasible.

In-person requests receive priority over telephone requests. Requests made by e-mail, fax and mail are answered as promptly as possible but limited resources or the complexity of the question may cause some delay in answering. The customer will be made aware of the progress of their question as best as is possible.

In-Person Reference Questions

In-person questions are answered on a first come, first serve basis. The staff person may use some discretion in altering the order of service if he/she feels that they can quickly take care of a second person when the first person has a complex or lengthy question.

Staff can look up quick, factual answers for the customer if the customer has no interest in exploring the sources themselves. More complex or lengthy searches may require staff to suggest appropriate sources for the customer to begin their own research. In this case, the staff person will instruct the customer on how the source is used. A staff person may need to excuse themselves to help others, but the customer is welcome to return with follow-up questions as they progress through their research.

GUIDELINES TO SPECIFIC TYPES OF QUESTIONS

The Library staff enjoys the wide variety of reference and reader's advisory questions they receive from the public. The staff are mainly generalists but some have specific areas of expertise as well. A research question may be directed to them for that reason. However, there are a number of specific research questions that cannot be answered by any staff person for a variety of reasons. These questions are exempt based on standard reference guidelines at most public libraries, including local libraries, SVLS (Silicon Valley Library System) policies and past practices at this Library.

Automobile, Truck and RV Valuations--The Library has an excellent collection of blue books and other materials that provide values for different modes of transportation. The staff will instruct customers in the use of these materials. With time permitting, the staff can provide phone customers with a

complete look up of the information on a maximum of two vehicles. Information on a maximum of two vehicles can be faxed to a customer.

Catalog and Database Assistance-- Understanding the Library's Catalog use and the ability to do effective searching within it is crucial to a customer's success in their use of the Library. The Library invests a significant amount of materials funding in electronic databases because the Library staff feels that it is critical to offer up-to-date, accurate and relevant information to their community.

Therefore, it is one of the fundamental roles of the public reference librarian to assist and instruct customers in the use of both the Library Catalog and electronic databases. The Library staff is happy to look up specific items or topics if the customer prefers but the Library staff also welcomes those customers who wish to learn more about how to do their own research in the future. Complex or lengthy instruction may require the Librarian to occasionally stop and assist other customers.

Collectibles, Appraisals--The Library has an excellent collection of appraisal books, both in the reference and circulating collections. Customers will be referred to these sources or to local consultants or appraisers, if appropriate. Due to the subtleties and complexities of many collectible and antique areas, Library staff cannot look up the value of an object over the phone or by fax, mail, or e-mail. Library staff can never give a personal appraisal regarding the value of any object. At no time should a customer bring in to the Library any type of weapon, even antique weapons, to do their research.

Compilations and Literature Searches--Requests for the creation of bibliographies, lists and extensive statistics, as well as exhaustive or lengthy research, are not considered a traditional role of the public reference librarian. The difference between research and reference is the amount of time required, sources used and ease of determining search strategies; research is the more involved of these. Customers needing this kind of research should be directed to appropriate materials and offered instructional assistance as staff time allows.

Computer and Internet Assistance--The Library offers a large number of computers for Internet use by the public. Due to staffing limitations, the Library staff can only assist with brief questions concerning the use of the Internet. Brief assistance with orientation to the elements of a web page, where and how to start a search, helping to find a particular email provider, walking through the attachment process in email, and helping someone get started with a new email provided are examples of the type of assistance the staff may provide.

Customers attempting to do research on the Internet are welcome to consult with the Librarian who will assist with developing search strategies using a variety of keywords and different search engines. Questions concerning the validity of the information provided by a specific web site also fall into the purview of the Librarian's role as a reference instructor.

Staff are not technology specialists and cannot assist with software or hardware issues beyond the very basics. The Library and the staff are not responsible nor can they fix problems with web pages that are do not work properly due to being down, requiring passwords or log-ins, not responding to logging in as expected or otherwise not appearing to work as desired by the customer. The customer will need to contact the owners of these web sites directly on their own. The staff person will assist them in finding contact information if it is listed.

Customers who are in need of fundamental and comprehensive training in Internet and/or computer use will be directed to local classes where appropriate. Librarians cannot assist with Internet questions that involve the customer's personal information such as Social Security numbers, bank accounts, passwords, credit card numbers, medical records, financial information or any other information deemed sensitive in the professional opinion of the Librarian. An appointment can be made for assistance with

job applications, resumé's, and other in-depth help that requires working with sensitive information.

Computer Laptop and Ethernet Connectivity Assistance--Every laptop has a different setup with different programs and operating systems. Staff are not technology specialists and cannot assist with software or hardware issues concerning a customer's laptop nor their ability to connect to the web. A handout based on the most popular operating systems, for connecting to the Internet through the City's web server has been developed by City staff and is available upon request at the Computer Help Desk on the second floor.

Consumer Evaluations--The Library provides many different reputable consumer magazines, both in paper and on-line. Indexes to these magazines are also available to the public both in and outside of the Library. Library staff will assist customers in how to use the indexes and how to locate specific articles on their product of interest. Published consumer ratings are developed by the pulling together of many different facts which are given different value weights in the opinion of the expert of the item in question. Simply providing the top three rated items in a list does not necessarily give the customer the correct answer to their question or needs. Therefore, consumer evaluation questions can only be answered in person.

Contest Questions--Contest questions will be given the same thoughtful consideration and attention as other reference questions. Those questions requiring complex or lengthy answers are subject to the same basic service and priorities guidelines as other reference questions. Some contest questions are deliberately tricky and may have more than one answer. Library staff cannot interpret contest question rules on behalf of the contestant.

Criss-Cross and City Directories--Criss-Cross and telephone questions can be requested by person, phone, e-mail, fax or mail. No more than three listings will be looked up per customer at any one time. Criss-Cross pages cannot be copied by Library staff due to copyright issues. This includes historical Criss-Cross materials. Nearby listings are never provided for Criss-Cross listings.

Critical Analysis of Literary Works--The Library has an extensive collection of materials that provide a critical analysis of a wide variety of literary works. Library staff will direct and instruct customers on the use of these materials. Library staff cannot provide personal critical analyses, interpretations or judgments regarding the merit of literary or other works.

Extensive Research--Exhaustive or lengthy research is not considered a traditional role of the public reference librarian. The difference between research and reference is the amount of time required, sources used and ease of determining search strategies; research is the more involved of these. Customers needing this kind of research should be directed to appropriate materials and offered instructional assistance as staff time allows.

Fax, E-mail and Mail Reference Questions--Short, factual informational questions that do not require extensive research can be received by fax, e-mail and mail. These questions will be answered as time allows by Librarians on desk or as assigned by the Supervising Librarian. Questions should be answered within one week. If a customer has an earlier deadline they should be contacted immediately and encouraged to come in to have their question answered. No more than 10 pages may be faxed in any response.

Genealogical Questions--Library staff can provide general assistance in genealogical research in both paper and online resources. Interlibrary loan and use of the Link+ system should be recommended when appropriate. Library staff cannot engage in actual genealogical research on behalf of customers.

Requests for genealogical information concerning local residents should be referred to the History Center staff. Customers who live outside the Bay Area who cannot come to the History Center in person will be provided with genealogical information provided there is staff or volunteer time to complete it.

Requests for copies of obituaries that are indexed in the Mountain View Obituary Database are limited to five pages per customer at any one time. There is no charge for these services at this time.

Grammar and Punctuation Advice--Library staff can recommend appropriate paper and on-line sources for customers to learn more about English grammar and punctuation. Library staff can instruct a customer on how to use these resources. While Library staff may point out obvious typos they cannot evaluate letters, papers, assignments or other lengthy written materials to determine if they are properly written.

Incomplete Questions--The Information Desks are staffed by both permanent and part-time employees. The Library is open more hours per day than any staff member's full work shift. This means that some questions may be incomplete at the end of a staff member's shift. These questions should be passed on to the person who is replacing them or their supervisor, whichever they feel is appropriate. In some cases where the staff person may be a specialist on the topic or for other specific reasons, the staff member can retain the question for their next shift as long as they confirm with the customer that they can wait.

Internet Research--When time permits, staff can help customers in developing successful Internet search strategies. When possible, staff will assist in determining the reliability and authenticity of specific Internet sites.

Interpretations of Research--Interpretative questions that require analysis or drawing of a conclusion from facts are beyond the scope of reference service. Many of these types of interpretations require specialized training or even licensing that Library staff do not have. The potential for harm and/or liability requires that Library staff provide factual information only. Referrals to appropriate experts or agencies can be offered where possible.

Legal Questions--Library staff cannot provide advice or interpretation of the law or legal matters. Library staff can direct customers to sources and instruct them in the use of these sources. While Library staff can assist a customer in looking up a specific Federal, State or local code, they cannot attempt to determine which code is appropriate to a customer's situation. Library staff can direct customers to books of legal forms but cannot determine what legal forms are appropriate to a customer's specific legal situation. Library staff cannot do complicated legal searches. Local resources and agencies will be offered to the customer as appropriate.

Market Research--Market research and market/industry surveys are a specialized field of research. Library staff will assist in finding published market and industry surveys that are available in traditional reference resources or on the Internet. If published material is not available, the customer will be referred to a local market research service provider.

Mathematical Computations--Mathematical computations will only be provided if a person on the Library staff has the appropriate expertise. In all other cases, the customer will be referred to sources containing the formula or tables necessary for them to complete their own calculations.

Medical Questions--There is a vast amount of medical information available in both paper and on-line resources. Customers are encouraged to come in to do their research in this complex area of information. Library staff will assist the customer in identifying appropriate sources for their questions concerning diseases, medications or therapeutic treatments. Questions answered over the phone will be limited to a verbatim reading of the material with no personal interpretations or relaying of personal experiences. Referrals to El Camino Hospital Library, Stanford Health Library and other appropriate resources are greatly encouraged.

Original Research--Library staff will not perform original research. This includes examining primary source materials to draw conclusions or to synthesize research, bibliographies on demand and

exhaustive literature searches. The Library staff will provide assistance in developing search strategies, identifying resources and locating other local resources as appropriate.

Patent, Trademark or Copyright Searches--Library staff can direct customers to specific paper and on-line sources to conduct these types of searches but cannot do a patent, trademark or copyright search on their behalf. Complete patent searches usually require a patent lawyer. Customers should be directed to the Sunnyvale Library and other local resources as appropriate.

Phone Reference Questions--Telephone reference should be used for short, factual information questions and is not for in-depth or extensive reference questions. Phone service is handled on a first come, first serve basis after the Librarian is free from in-person service needs. The Library accepts calls from anywhere in the world. Return calls are limited to the United States. Sources should always be cited to the customer before giving the answer to the question.

Once a phone question interview has begun, the question should be completed before any other customer will be assisted. If the staff person determines, in their professional judgment, that it is too busy at the service desk to answer the question, they will take the information necessary to call the customer back with the answer they need. While every attempt will be made to call the customer back as quickly as possible, in-house demand and limited resources may make that difficult.

Staff are able to place specific circulating titles on hold for a phone customer. Reference materials that contain the answer the customer needs can be held at the desk if the staff person determines there is room for the item to be stored and if the item will not be needed in the short term by others. Frequently used reference items need to remain on the shelf for others to use. Extensive pulling of subject topics in either reference or circulation materials cannot be done due to space and time constraints as well as the need to keep materials available to others who may need them as well.

Photocopy and Microform Assistance--Library staff will instruct customers in the use of the photocopier and microform machines. Library staff can load a piece of microfilm or microfiche for a customer so that they can get started on their research. Library staff can help make up to three copies to get a customer started and to help them understand how the machine works. Library staff cannot assist in large-scale copying due to time constraints and copyright issues that may pertain to the materials being copied. Due to limited staff resources, Library staff cannot make copies for the public in advance of their arrival to the Library.

Poems, Plots and Quotations--Library staff will search standard indexes, specialized bibliographic sources and relevant on-line sources to identify these types of questions. Collective memory is a tool often used by Library staff and can be very effective. Answers found by collective memory should be verified by a citable source before the answer is given to the customer. A reasonable amount will be spent on this type of question and then it will be forwarded to another level of service such as SVLS Reference Center when deemed appropriate by either the researching Librarian or the Supervising Librarian.

Referrals to Other Agencies--Referrals for information should only be done after the Library's internal resources have been completely utilized in the professional opinion of the staff. Staff can refer a question to another library or agency if, in their professional opinion, they feel it is appropriate. Other agencies and libraries will have their own rules and policies concerning these outside referrals that the staff member will be required to respect when making their decision. Since the delivery of the answer is in the hands of outside resources, the Library cannot guarantee a time or date as to when the information will be received. Customers who wish to use this service will need to provide a name and phone number for contact purposes.

Resumes, Job Applications, & Cover Letters-- Special assistance with job applications, college applications and resumes may be made available when staffing levels permit. Appointments will be

made in advance with 1-4 people at the same time. Appointments are limited to a maximum of one hour, twice a week.

This type of assistance requires that staff be exposed to some personal information. The customer will be reminded of this before the staff member works with them. The staff person will not make any notes, and any print outs that are created will be given to the customer or shredded at the end of the session.

School Assignments--Homework-related questions will be given the same thoughtful consideration and attention as other reference questions. Those questions requiring complex or lengthy answers are subject to the same basic service and priority guidelines as other reference questions. However, staff should find out part of the original intent of the assignment was to have students learn how to conduct independent research at the Library. Every attempt should be made to show the student how to find the answer, rather than giving the answer directly.

Whenever possible, students should be encouraged to come in and be an active part of the reference process. Parents who come in to do homework assignments on their child's behalf should be encouraged to return with the student. When both the parent and the student are present, the student should be interacting directly with the Library staff.

Statistics--Statistics about the number of questions asked are kept at both desks. On occasion more sophisticated, in-depth surveys may be taken. These statistics are used, and sometimes required, in reports to different government agencies. They may also be used to determine staffing levels and needs as well as serve as a tool for finding means to improve service to our community.

Stock Quotations--Library staff will accept requests for stock quotations by telephone for up to three stocks OR three dates for one stock. Stock quotations that can be located on-line quickly will be answered immediately if time allows. Stock quotations that require more research, such as the use of magazine back issues, will require a call back. Call backs will be done as quickly as possible but may require that the staff member be off desk before they can locate the materials necessary to answer their questions. If time is an issue, the customer should be encouraged to come into the Library to do their research.

Tax Questions--Library staff can recommend appropriate paper and on-line sources for customers to conduct their research. Library staff can instruct a customer on how to use these resources. Library staff cannot provide tax advice nor recommend specific tax forms for an individual. Due to limited staff resources, Library staff cannot make copies for the public in advance of their arrival to the Library.

Translations--Library staff will provide brief translations only if a staff member is available with the appropriate language expertise. Customers will be directed to language dictionaries, local resources or on-line sources such as Babelfish if their requests are more complex or time sensitive.

Wireless Connectivity Assistance--The Library is fortunate to be located in a place where free Google wireless Internet access is available to the public. This access is provided by an outside Internet provider and is not a City- or Library-related service. The Library has been given a set of instructions by Google is available at the Computer Help Desk on the second floor. Staff are not technology specialists and cannot assist with software or hardware issues concerning a customer's laptop nor their ability to connect to the web.

LOAN OF REFERENCE MATERIALS

Reference materials are intended for in-house use. Library staff may occasionally approve the loan of reference materials if they feel, in their professional judgment, that the item will not be missed for a short period of time. Popular, expensive and/or irreplaceable reference materials cannot be loaned out at any

time. If the Librarian is unsure of whether something can be loaned out, they should consult with either the selector for that subject area or the Supervising Librarian.

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background or views of those contributing to their creation.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background or views.

VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Adopted June 18, 1948 by the ALA Council; amended February 2, 1961; January 23, 1980; inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996.

THE FREEDOM TO READ STATEMENT

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy. It is continuously under attack. Private groups and public authorities in various parts of the country are working to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label "controversial" views, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors and to purge libraries. These actions apparently rise from a view that our national tradition of free expression is no longer valid; that censorship and suppression are needed to counter threats to safety or national security as well as to avoid the subversion of politics and the corruption of morals. We, as individuals devoted to reading and as librarians and publishers responsible for disseminating ideas, wish to assert the public interest in the preservation of the freedom to read.

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary individual, by exercising critical judgment, will select the good and reject the bad. We trust Americans to recognize propaganda and misinformation and to make their own decision about what they read and believe. We do not believe they are prepared to sacrifice their heritage of a free press in order to be "protected" against what others think may be bad for them. We believe they still favor free enterprise in ideas and expression.

These efforts at suppression are related to a larger pattern of pressures being brought against education, the press, art and images, films, broadcast media and the Internet. The problem is not only one of actual censorship. The shadow of fear cast by these pressures leads, we suspect, to an even larger voluntary curtailment of expression by those who seek to avoid controversy or unwelcome scrutiny by government officials.

Such pressure toward conformity is perhaps natural to a time of accelerated change. And yet suppression is never more dangerous than in such a time of social tension. Freedom has given the United States the elasticity to endure strain. Freedom keeps open the path of novel and creative solutions, and enables change to come by choice. Every silencing of a heresy, every enforcement of an orthodoxy diminishes the toughness and resilience of our society and leaves it the less able to deal with controversy and difference.

Now, as always in our history, reading is among our greatest freedoms. The freedom to read and write is almost the only means for making generally available ideas or manners of expression that can initially command only a small audience. The written word is the natural medium for the new idea and the untried voice from which come the original contributions to social growth. It is essential to the extended discussion that serious thought requires, and to the accumulation of knowledge and ideas into organized collections.

We believe that free communication is essential to the preservation of a free society and a creative culture. We believe that these pressures toward conformity present the danger of limiting the range and variety of inquiry and expression on which our democracy and our culture depend. We believe that every American community must jealously guard the freedom to publish and to circulate in order to preserve its own freedom to read. We believe that publishers and librarians have a profound responsibility to give validity to that freedom to read by making it possible for the readers to choose freely from a variety of offerings.

The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. *It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular or considered dangerous by the majority.*

Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. *Publishers, librarians and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.*

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. *It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.*

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. *There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.*

To some, much of the modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters, values differ and values cannot be legislated, nor can machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. *It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression or its author as subversive or dangerous.*

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for others. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.*

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society, individuals are free to determine for themselves that they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free and creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

7. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of the affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.*

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said. Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties and deserves of all Americans the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here state out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important, that ideas can be dangerous, but that the suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

This statement was originally issued in May 1953 by the Westchester Conference of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council which in 1970 consolidated with the American Educational Publishers Institute to become the Association of American Publishers.

Adopted June 25, 1953 by the ALA Council and the AAP Freedom to Read Committee; amended January 28, 1972; January 16, 1991; July 12, 2000; and June 30, 2004. Affirmed the Freedom to Read Statement December 19, 2005.